

# S.F. Fighting Federal Plan To Restore Bay

## Hetch Hetchy threatened

*By Elliot Diring*  
*Chronicle Staff Writer*

As the federal government puts the finishing touches on a sweeping plan to restore San Francisco Bay, it is discovering that one of its harshest critics is the city by the bay.

On December 15, the Clinton administration plans to announce a slew of environmental measures aimed at reviving the bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta by sending them fresh water now flowing to cities and farms.

The looming deadline, culminating about 20 years of bickering over bay-delta flows, has set water agencies up and down the state scrambling to deflect the federal regulations and protect their precious supplies.

Among them is the city of San Francisco, which under the federal rules could be forced to give up a good chunk of its Hetch Hetchy supply to help rebuild salmon runs on the badly degraded San Joaquin River.

Environmentalists, who for years have battled Southern Californians and Central Valley farmers to secure more water for the ailing bay-delta estuary, are furious that as the battle now draws to a climax, San Francisco is taking the other side.

"Instead of supporting strong bay-delta standards and committing their fair share of water, they're standing in the way," said Barry Nelson, executive director of the Save San Francisco Bay Association.

"It's very ironic that now that we're close to getting good federal standards, San Francisco's emerged as a major obstacle."

Andy Moran, general manager of the city's Public Utilities Commission, said San Francisco is willing to shoulder its burden, but the Hetch Hetchy system can't keep up with demand as it is, and the federal proposals would take away far more water than is needed.

"We want to make sure that whatever water is contributed is going to do some good — that it's not just based on wishful thinking or unfounded theories," said Moran, one of many California water officials who have flown to Washington, D.C., in recent weeks to press their case.

"We're taking the same position, all the (agricultural) and urban agencies are: You use water efficiently and you use the best available information," said Moran. "We're not different from anyone else playing in that arena. We are not asking for special treatment, and we're not an impediment."

The federal proposals — aimed not just at saving certain species already declared endangered but at restoring the entire estuary to good health — could amount to the biggest reshuffling of water rights in California history.

They are being crafted by four federal agencies, led by the Environmental Protection Agency, which warned state officials repeatedly over the years that unless they came up with acceptable bay-delta standards it would step in and impose its own.

A draft proposal floated by federal regulators last year was

S.F. BAY: Page A31 Col. 1

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

F - 0 0 0 0 6 7

F-000067

## S.F. BAY

From Page A25

promptly blasted by Governor Wilson, who accused the Clinton administration of again meddling in California affairs and grossly underestimating the potential cost to the state in both water and jobs.

At Wilson's behest, the state Water Resources Control Board once again launched hearings aimed at developing state standards. Although the board has promised a draft by year's end, it has given little indication what it plans to deliver.

Indeed, both state and federal regulators are hoping the competing trio of California water — cities, farmers and environmentalists — save them from having to make tough decisions by striking consensus among themselves.

All sides say they've made significant headway over the past year, but major differences remain. By and large, environmentalists are backing the federal proposals while major water suppliers, both urban and agricultural, are lining up behind an alternate plan that costs them far less water.

If, for instance, there were a repeat of the 1986-92 drought, the draft federal standards would cut delta exports up to 1.4 million acre feet a year, or more than 25 percent. The water suppliers' plan would take no more than 1 million acre feet a year.

A major sticking point is how much water is needed to rebuild salmon runs on the San Joaquin River. That is key to San Francisco because the Tuolumne River source for its Hetchy Hetchy system is upstream from the San Joaquin and would have to contribute to the increased flows.

The city's consultants say the salmon need only half as much water as EPA is proposing. But environmentalists say San Francisco's insistence on lower flows would leave the San Joaquin a near-dead river, and could sink any effort at a comprehensive bay-delta solution.

"If San Francisco is not willing to look at more protective measures (for the San Joaquin), we could be looking at a deal killer," said Gary Bobker, a policy analyst at the Bay Institute in San Rafael. "Considering how we've been able to close the gap on so many other things, there's no reason for that."